WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857 JANUARY 1976

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER
A—A—A—H ANN ARBOR, A WONDERFUL TOWN

It was just about thirty three years ago now that I first laid eyes on Ann Arbor and it was love at first sight.

Wasn't it and isn't it a wonderful town? The grand old trees spreading over the streets, the lovely old buildings, the exciting University and the beautiful women...I can say without fear of contradiction that Ann Arbor has more beautiful women per square acre than we grew in a square mile back home in Spokane.

Remember the old court house and the benches on the lawn at Huron and Main? Across the street was the Court Tavern. The best hamburgers came out of their ancient electric oven. If it had ever broken down, they would have been out of business.

And remember, down the street the Round Table served as a noon social club for the Trust Building bunch and the Ann Arbor News gang and others? Around on Washington St. was Flautz's Cafe where you could get a fine German dinner for a dollar and a half.

Up on Main Street, Bertie Muehlig's house was still standing. A beautiful old home. Somewhere in the block was the winter dining room of the Barton Hills Country club with "Buck" Starbuck, manager.

Around on Liberty Street the P Bell had round wooden tables with carved initials, and you could get a few hard boiled eggs with a pitcher of beer. They'd ring the bell for your 21st birthday.

Over on Anne Street, Malloy's Harness Shop was still in operation and turning out harnesses and saddles. A horse collar hung on either side of the front door. A great place to poke around. Milt Kemnitz caught its spirit in the drawing below.

They say you should never look back. It is not good for your neuroses or psyche or whatever. But every fourth Thursday of the month at the WCHS meetings we do a lot of remembering when and remembering who, and no one has yet mentioned a frayed phobia or a warped neurosis.

Sorry no hard boiled eggs nor beer, but we do provide coffee and cakes or cookies following the speaker. This month's meeting... Refinishing and Reconditioning Antiques...should be most interesting to the antique collector. Do come.

Thomas F. Lacy

HARNESS SHOP KEMNITZ

DO YOUR ANTIQUE 'FINDS' NEED REFINISHING? LEARN HOW TO DO IT AT MEETING

Have you just found a scratched old table with a broken leg at the garage sale down the street or do you wonder how to make Great-Aunt Theodosia's loveseat presentable after all those years in the attic?

The Washtenaw County Historical Society's January meeting is just the place to find out. It will be at 8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 22, in Liberty Hall at Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan, Liberty at Division Sts., Ann Arbor.

David Shafer, owner of Old Brick Quality Refinishing at 1010 Pontiac St. for the past four years, will talk about and demonstrate stripping, repairing, preparing for finish, and finishing of antiques.

MILAN CHOOSES OFFICERS

Milan Historical Society elected Ken Baumann president at its December meeting and Christmas party.

Warren Hale will serve as vice-president, Susan Bies as secretary and Carole Smith as treasurer. Lorene Burger was elected to the board of directors. Continuing on the board are Arleigh Squires, Jack Cullip and Iva Sanford.

WYSTAN STEVENS TO SPEAK

The February meeting of WCHS will feature Ann Arbor buildings of historic interest as presented by Wystan Stevens, local historian and curator of Kempf House. It will be at 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 26, in Liberty Hall.

UNKNOWN ARCHITECT'S WORK NOW HAILED

Candlelight and holiday cheer filled the parlors of the historic Wilson-Wahr house at 126 N. Division St. as the Washtenaw County Historical Society gathered there for a December 21 open house.

The stately old house, the home of prominent citizens, has had some ups and downs. It was once sold at auction at the Court House and it lost its roof in a cyclone in 1919. Further, its architectural style fell into disregard for a number of years.

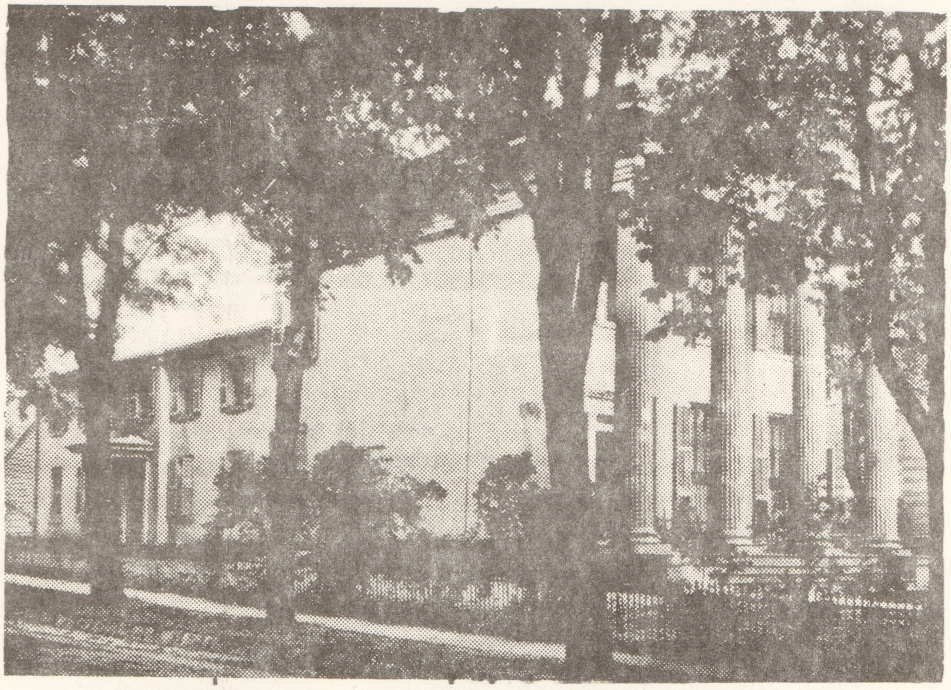
The house which has more recently been called one of the most perfect of its type—Greek revival—is believed to have been built in the 1840's by Judge Robert S. Wilson. Since 1892 it has been owned and occupied by members of the George Wahr family.

It was the late University of Michigan Professor of Architecture Emil Lorch who wrote "This is one of the most perfect houses of its type and must by all means be preserved." He was state chairman for the Historical American Buildings Survey (HABS).

More recently it has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places and was ranked in the highest category in a local survey.

Prof. Lorch thought the house was built in three units, beginning at the rear, with a dining room between it and the main house.

The house stands on part of the original 160 acres taken up from the government in 1824 by Ann Arbor's co-founder, John Allen. Prof. Lorch found the deed listed a "dwelling" on the lot in 1835.



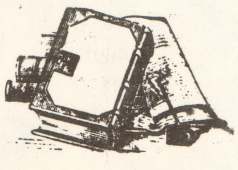
The Wilson-Wahr house was being rented by Phi Delta Phi fraternity when this picture was made. The Wahr's built and occupied the house next door during that time.

John W. Maynard disposed of the property in 1837 and three transfers later Judge Wilson received a warranty deed from Mark Howard on Oct. 9, 1840.

Judge Wilson sold it to John A. Welles April 10, 1850. Later Welles sister-in-law, Susan S. Welles, widow of John's brother, a hardware merchant, bought it. During her ownership, land for the extension of Ann St. east was donated to the city, according to Mrs. James Sallade, daughter of George Wahr.

Following Mrs. Welles death her daughters sold it to Elizabeth E. Royer in 1880.

Twelve years later following her death, George Wahr happened to be standing outside his bookstore on Main St. across from the Court House when he learned the house was being sold at auction at the Court House. He got it for a high bid of $7,500. The deed was dated July 25, 1892.



Speaking to WCHS in 1943, Prof. Lorch said, "To American architectural historians, the best known Ann Arbor building is the Judge Wilson-George Wahr house, an outstanding example with Greek Ionic portico of fine proportions, fluted shafts and well-carved capitals of the Attic type. The interior is on an equally high plane in design and well maintained."

His talk was recorded in Washtenaw Impressions, Vol. II, No. 1, 1944. His papers in the Michigan Historical Collections in the U-M Bentley Library give further details about the house.

It is made of stucco on brick with a stone foundation and wood cornices and columns, he noted.

"Generations of painting have not obscured the scoring of the stucco to suggest stone blocks. So also the fluting of the columns is clear as are the spiral lines of the Greek Ionic capitals."

The Greek revival style unit is two parlors deep in Prof. Lorch's words, with side stair hall and part of a small room, the rear part of which is in a lower ceilinged adjoining unit. The two story plain rear part has a north side entrance hall, south bay window and upper floor at lower level than that of the main unit.

The windows originally had outside and inside blinds, he said. The parlor windows rise from floor level and are framed by slender paneled pilasters and a light cornice with good detail, Prof. Lorch noted.

White marble mantles of the parlor fireplaces have roundheaded openings with iron frames. Wood-covered ceilings in the front part are of the John A. Welles period, he notes and wonders if the plaster "failed".

"The substantial walnut stair newel and the balustrade resemble others of the period."

A 1934 HABS report by a survey worker says the original house had no basement under the front part, but later when this portion was excavated, the walls were not underpinned, but the earth was removed to within three feet of outside walls, and retaining walls built from floor level to grade.

"In the basement, under the dining room, was located the old kitchen--hearth and Dutch oven being still intact." Adz marks are visible on the beam in the front basement furnace room today.

"Although the architect is still unknown," Prof. Lorch writes, "its (the house's) high excellence implies a designer familiar with classical sources, having a skilled carver for capitals."

At the time the front part of the house was built, Prof. Lorch notes that there were architects in Detroit and several houses and buildings of good classical design there.

The Greek Revival however was replaced by other styles after 1850. By 1926, Howard Major, an architect, writes in The Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic, The Greek Revival,

"...it is high time that Michigan, Ohio, Georgia and Alabama should acquire for posterity some of the Greek Revival buildings which are their only archeological tradition. The Greek Revival is emerging from its days of calumny and neglect, and now a hundred years after its ascendancy, its appreciation is manifest..."

"But a few years ago we knew of the wooden Greek temple under the sobriquet of "Carpenter's Classic"; today we look at it with new interest and recognize it as the architecture of the early American Republic."

The 1934 report notes "A cyclone removed the roof in 1919. In reconstruction the heavy oak framing was disregarded and the roof built in the usual way."

Today the Thomas C. Lacys make their home in a portion of the house. Mrs. Lacy is the former Natalie Sallade, daughter of George Wahr Sallade. His mother was Nathalie Wahr Sallade, daughter of George Wahr. The Lacy's infant son, T. Matthew Lacy, is the fifth generation of the family to live there.

The Lacys have done a considerable amount of redecorating to enhance the house, painting, wallpapering and cleaning the fancy woodwork on ten foot high ceilings of the front rooms. (Lacy vows if he cleans the ceilings again he'll use a scaffold like Michelangelo.)

DAUGHTER TO TALK ABOUT NOTED QUAKER GENEALOGIST

"Impressions of William Wade Hinshaw, Editor of the American Encyclopedia of Quaker Genealogy" by his daughter, Anne Hinshaw Wing.

That will be the topic of the WCHS Genealogy Section meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan 25, at the Senior Citizens Guild, 502 W. Huron St., Ann Arbor. Before the meeting, a member will be on hand from noon on to discuss problems.

Mr. Hinshaw who was a basso with the Metropolitan Opera moved to Ann Arbor in the "teens" with his family so they could attend the University. While here he owned Root's Music Store at the corner of William and Maynard Sts.

HSM PLANS SPRING TOUR

The Historical Society of Michigan will sponsor a spring tour to Charleston and Beaufort, S.C., and Savannah, Ga., March 21-27.

The tour includes guided historic tours as well as air fare and accommodations for six nights at first class hotels, and some meals. The cost is $398 per person with double occupancy. Reservations are due by Jan. 30. Further details are available from HSM, at 2117 Washtenaw Ave., telephone 769-1828.

CLARIFIES REMARKS

Thomas F. Lacy wishes to emphasize that at a public hearing on expansion of the Gandy Dancer Restaurant that "I identified myself as a member of the Washtenaw County Historical Society but did not state that I spoke on behalf of the society."

His remarks were quoted in the January 9, 1976, issue of The Ann Arbor News where he was identified as a member of WCHS. He wishes to clear up any misimpressions.

JUDGE WILSON, REPUTED BUILDER OF WILSON–WAHR HOUSE WAS PROBATE JUDGE, STATE SENATOR IN 1830'S, 1840'S

The man who is believed to have built the Wilson-Wahr house at 126 N. Division St., Robert S. Wilson, an attorney, served Washtenaw County both as a probate judge and state senator in the 1830's and 1840's.

He came from Alleghany County, New York, in 1835, according to Chapman's 1881 History of Washtenaw County. He is described as "a man of ability (who) knew how to influence a jury."

He was elected probate judge in November, 1836, and served one four-year term. In 1843-44 he was elected to the Michigan Senate. In 1855 he moved to Chicago where he served as a police justice for many years. He died early in 1883.

He apparently was a founding member of Washtenaw Chapter No. 6 of the Masons, organized Oct. 15, 1849, and active in political affairs.

Two of his letters on political matters to Alpheus Felch, a Michigan Supreme Court Justice, Governor, Senator and U-M law professor, may be found in the Felch papers in the Michigan Historical Collections at the U-M's Bentley Library.

Also his advice, along with that of other judges, apparently encouraged a publisher of the Michigan Argus newspaper, in his fight against setting aside the circuit court system in a judicial reform move.

The publisher, L.W. Cole, is quoted in Samuel Beakes' Past and Present of Washtenaw County, telling how the issue split the Democrats.

When Dr. Denton and John Allen among about 80 of his own party voted against Judge Felch and the Democratic ticket, "it gave me serious thoughts about the course I was to take. But good counsel from Judges Mundy, Miles, Fletcher, Wilson and others" encouraged him, Cole wrote.

The fight was successful although his subscribers were down to only 50 during the "battle". Later when he disposed of The Argus there were 1,800 he said.

Original at County Building

JUDGE ROBERT S. WILSON

CHELSEA ELECTS OFFICERS

Marian Sprague is the new president of the Chelsea Area Historical Society. Marie Petsch is vice-president; Carla Schwarze, secretary; and Alice Thornton, treasurer. Ann Feeney is the new member of the board of directors.

Officers of the year old society were elected in December.

DRIVERS HAD TO STOP

Attesting to the unnerving effect of noisy automobiles on "old Dobbin" was a Michigan law in effect from 1905-1928 requiring drivers to stop their cars, turn off the engine and, if necessary, render assistance to drivers of horsedrawn vehicles.

The law is recalled by Kenneth Earl Peters in his 1972 master's thesis on "The Good Roads Movement and The Michigan State Highway Department, 1905-1917," on file in the Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, U. of M.

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

Mr. Smith was tearing the roof off of his barn. His neighbor, Thompson, passing by, stopped and asked him what he was going to do with the old tin.

"That's just what I have been wondering," Smith replied.

"Send it to the Ford Motor Company. They might be able to use it," Thompson suggested. So Smith acted on the suggestion, crated the tin, and shipped it to Detroit.

A few days later he received a very courteous letter from the Ford Motor Company.

"Your car," they wrote, "is one of the worst wrecks we have ever seen, but we'll have it fixed for you within a week or ten days."

NEW NAME FOR TIN LIZZIE

"Absolutely the newest name for the Ford was given in a letter by a reader in which he speaks of his 'Rattle-ac'."

From Ford Smiles: All the Best Current Jokes About A Rattling Good Car, gathered by Carleton B. Case, Shrewesbury Publishing Co., Chicago, 1917.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, Phone 663-8826
Keylining: Dorothy Wood and Anna Thorsch
Printing and Typesetting: Courtesy of Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan and Drury, Lacy, Inc.

GEORGE WAHR, A NAME LONG ASSOCIATED WITH BOOKS HERE, BOUGHT GREEK REVIVAL DIVISION ST. HOME AT AUCTION

George Wahr is a name that has been associated with book selling in Ann Arbor since 1883.

The name survives today in the George Wahr Publishing Co. at 304½ S. State although the two stores that were familiar to generations of city and rural pupils and University students are now closed.

In the days before "free" textbooks issued by the schools, a trip to Wahr's was almost as certain as the beginning of school because the Main St. store handled the texts used in all the rural and city schools.

The young George Wahr bought the "Wilson-Wahr" house at 126 N. Division St. in 1892 when he chanced to learn it was being auctioned at the Court House across the street from his Main Street store and submitted the high bid.

Like many other local business men he was of German ancestry. His parents emigrated from Germany in 1835. He was born in this county Feb. 18, 1861, near Chelsea but went to school in Ann Arbor.

The Portrait and Biographical Album of Washtenaw County, Michigan, 1891, lists him as "a successful dealer in the book and stationery trade who has his establishment at No. 4 N. Main St."

No. 4 N. Main St. was later 105 N. Main, now on the site of the park where the Municipal Court Bldg. burned a few years ago. The building was earlier known as the Ann Arbor Savings Bank Bldg.

The 1896 Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti City Directory (one volume) lists "George Wahr, Books, Stationery, Wallpaper, Window Shades and Mouldings, 4 Main N. and 20 State S." The two stores both had the same phone number, "26", but two rings for Main St. and three rings for State St.

Young George Wahr had begun as a clerk in John Moore's book store, then became a partner

Courtesy Sallade Family

GEORGE WAHR

in Osius and Co. and later bought out his partner.

On Sept. 10, 1884, he married Miss Emma Stabler, daughter of Fred Stabler, a prominent stock broker of Ann Arbor, according to the Biographical Album.

The couple's only child, Nathalie, later Mrs. James A. Sallade, died Oct. 3, 1973 at age 87. Her only child, George Wahr Sallade, a local attorney, still owns the publishing business. The Main St. store was closed in 1957, the State St. store in 1972.

The publishing company specializes in University text books, though in a slight departure, it recently published an autobiography of retired University History Professor Preston Slosson.

Part of the heritage of many years in the book business is Sallade's large collection of books including signed first editions by Hemingway.

COUNTY CALENDAR

Dexter Historical Society--7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 29, Wylie School Cafetorium. President Norma McAllister will show her slides of Shaker Village, Kentucky. A second slide show will be on restored buildings in the Smoky Mountains. Tourists can now stay and eat in some of the original buildings at Shaker Village she explained.

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Milan Historical Society--7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Milan Community House.

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Salem Historical Society--7:30 p.m. Monday, January 19, at home of President Doris Gillahan, 9629 Six Mile Rd., Salem. Meeting monthly on third Monday at Gillahans or across street at township hall. Plan to set up committees to collect Salem history.

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Saline Area Historical Society--8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 20, in Blue Lounge of Saline High School. (A member will be at the auditorium door to guide meeting-goers.) Bess Tefft, a local author and historian, will speak on "The First Ten Years of Agriculture in Washtenaw County, 1820-1830," a period when almost everybody was a farmer. She will touch on different kinds of rural homes including the old adobe brick home in which she lives on Textile Rd. Visitors welcome.

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Ypsilanti Historical Society--3-5 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 25, at the Ladies Literary Club, 218 N. Washington St.

Sunday, January 18 from 2-4 p.m. Mrs. David Pennington of Ann Arbor will bring some of her extensive collection of spinning wheels and demonstrate spinning at the Ypsilanti Historical Museum, 220 N. Huron St.

Washtenaw County
Historical Society
Meeting
Thursday, Jan. 22, '76
8:00 P.M.
LIBERTY HALL
ANN ARBOR FEDERAL SAVINGS
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